

# Ten Minutes' Caution

FROM

## A PLAIN MAN to his FELLOW-CITIZENS.

IT is in general of very little importance to the reader to know who, or what sort of person, the writer of any thing is. But to you, Fellow Citizens, I think it is material to consider who the men are whose writings on public matters are recommended to your perusal. In this view you will permit me to tell you something of myself. First, then, I will tell you who I am not. I am not a Foreigner, who would gratify resentment as well as pride by throwing this country into confusion. I am not a desperate Incendiary, whose circumstances cannot be made worse by any change, who will take the chance of setting the house on fire that he may pilfer the furniture while it is burning. I am not a furious Enthusiast in Religion or Politics, who, under pretence of Toleration in the one, or Liberty in the other, would overturn the established Church or the established Constitution. I am none of those, my Brethren. I am a plain man, a tradesman, who, having acquired a competency by his honest industry, is now winding up his business, in order to enjoy that competency in ease and quiet, in his old age, in the midst of a virtuous family of his own rearing. I know nothing of great Men or Ministers, and concern myself no farther about them than as I think their measures are for the interest of my country. I care not who sits at the Helm, provided the Vessel be well steered.—But though I am perfectly independent as to my own circumstances, yet I am dependent as far as this goes, that the happiness, or the prospect of the happiness, of my Fellow Citizens makes me happy: Their unhappiness, or the fear of their unhappiness, makes me unhappy.

In this character, and with these feelings, I am tempted to use my pen, for the first time in public, to caution my countrymen against the mischief which some men would wish to do among you; to beg of you not to endanger the peace and prosperity of yourselves and your Country to gratify their Malice, their Ambition, or their Hopes of Gain.

Consider, my Friends, at what time, and in what circumstances, those men would persuade us to make a change in our situation. Would any of us think it prudent, in the way of trade, if our business were good, our shop well frequented, our customers increasing, in short, every thing about us in a thriving condition, all at once to alter our *Firm*, to change our Agents abroad, to dismiss our Clerks and Servants at home, and to tell our customers that we were to deal with them quite in a different way for the future? Would any of us do this? Or would not our relations take out a commission of lunacy against us if we did?—Just as madly, my Friends, it appears to me, should we act, if, in the present situation of our public affairs, we should think of altering that Constitution under which, by the blessing of God, we have attained, and enjoy, our present National Security and Prosperity.

I should be glad to know what advantage we are to get by the Levelling of Ranks, which those writers would persuade us to wish for, by regaining what they call the *Rights of Man*. If they have a mind to go back to the woods again, and live as they say men lived in this country two thousand years ago, let them, in God's name; but I, who am sitting in a good snug parlour with all my family comforts around me, will rather chuse to keep as I am. If there is to be any society at all, I presume some must necessarily be richer and more powerful than others: but if those who have little are secure of it, I say, as I said before, they may be as happy as those who have the most. As things are at present, I find great advantages in the riches and grandeur of some of my countrymen. I have a set of wealthy customers who put a great deal of money into my pocket in the year, whose expences, suitable to their rank and situation in life, enable me to enjoy all the solid comforts suitable to mine.

I received, some time ago, a letter from an old friend and correspondent at *Manchester*, full of hard words, and in a high-flown style, complaining of the extravagance and luxury of Dukes and Lords, who were no better flesh and blood than he or I, and asking me to put down my name to a set of Resolutions for correcting that abuse. I thought at first my old friend had been playing upon me, as it was about the *fooling* time of the year; but when I was told that there were seriously such Resolutions proposed at *Manchester*, I wrote a serious answer. I desired him to recollect how much of my money had gone through his hands since our first dealings with one another, and that I believed in my conscience there was scarce a single *Necessary* in all our accounts; so that if *Luxury* was to be put down, he must shut up shop. I believe my good friend was ashamed of himself, for he answered my next order, and said nothing more of the Resolutions.

The modern Levellers tell us what we are to gain by their plan, but, my Friends, it is necessary for us to think what we should lose by it. Every man in a decent situation in life, even if he earns his bread by the sweat of his brow, has something he can call his own, something he feels comfortable in, and which

his way of life has made more suitable to him than the fine things of other people in a higher sphere, which is generally a situation of more care than comfort.

Every man who has something to preserve for himself, and too honest to encroach on his neighbours, will tremble at the effects of throwing loose every bond of peace and good order. My *Manchester* friends some time ago had a taste of the consequences in the burning of their cotton mills.—This is a strong instance of what are the principles lately attempted to be introduced among us. The truth is, I believe, that if this new system was to take place, the effect would be, that the next day all the rich would be ruined, above half the industrious would be soon put out of employ, and in a little time all the poor would be starved.

We hear a great deal about the *Americans* and the *French*, and the excellent Governments they have established; and one of the great Apostles of the new Doctrines tells us how much we should profit by adopting the like Governments. In the first place, I am strongly inclined to suspect the friendship of this gentleman's advice. He tells us himself that he began by doing this country all the harm in his power in favour of America; that he formed the scheme, during the war with that country, of coming to England for the purpose of broaching his principles; and seems to have thought, that if people were mad enough to listen to him, we should soon have been in such a situation, that neither America nor any other Country would have had any thing to fear from us.—I am told he has since resided principally in France, where he has probably found new reasons for making this attempt;—and yet this impostor now gravely tells you, that this is done from his great regard for your welfare: as far as himself is concerned he risks little, as, by all accounts, he has neither property nor reputation to lose.

This gentleman tells us we have no Constitution, and that what we have is wretchedly bad, and that therefore we should overturn it, and get the American or the French Constitution as fast as we can. I do not imagine any of my countrymen know what these American or French Constitutions are; and I confess, I hardly think it worth their enquiry, while they are happy under our own. I believe, however, the fact is, that the Americans, after they left us, were under great difficulty how to go on at all. Luckily for them, Mr. Paine was not at hand to preach confusion; they had still some notion left of the British Constitution under which they had so long lived, and they had sense enough to conform to it as nearly as they could. As to France, their old Government was bad enough; what it is now, it is difficult to say: I am told that, in fact, they have no Government at all; and what it will end in, he must be very wise or very bold that will guess.

Mr. Paine tells us we are oppressed and ruined by taxes; and he proposes, if we will let him make a new Constitution for us, to save us a world of expence, by turning adrift all the present servants of Government, and having only a certain number of officers, by whom all the business of the Nation is to be done. Our taxes (one half of which were laid on to pay the debt of the American war, in which Mr. Paine was so active against us), to be sure, are heavy, and I am glad to find that our present managers have begun to take off some of them; but I don't find we have been ruined even by these taxes; on the contrary, we have been thriving apace under the present Government. But what is the reason we pay these expences? Because the business of a Nation, like that of an individual, cannot be done without paying the servants it necessarily employs. Mr. Paine, indeed, has made this wonderful discovery, That if you have fewer servants at less wages, it would cost you less. This may be very true; but if a farmer were to part with his labourers, or a manufacturer with his workmen, under pretence of diminishing his expences, and it appeared that he did this without considering the extent and manner of cultivating the farm, or the nature and profit of the manufacture, do you think that either would be foolish enough to take advice? If they did, the consequence would be, that at the end of the year the farmer would be turned out of his bargain for not paying his rent, and the manufacturer would become a bankrupt.

My friends, I am no philosopher, nor fine writer, though I got a tolerable education at the Charter-House, and remember a little of my *Grammar* as well as Mr. Paine. But without philosophy or fine writing, I may venture to beseech you, not to throw away all the blessings you possess on a wild experiment to find something better, and that too on the authority of people who have an interest in misleading you. For my own part, I am come to an age that cannot look for living long to enjoy our present national prosperity; but I have children and grandchildren; and I cannot bear to think, that folly or wickedness should endanger the happiness which I hope they will inherit, by having the good fortune to be born under the *British Constitution*.